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AUTHOR Sanacore, Joseph
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ABSTRACT

Because independent reading builds the foundation for long-term literacy, administrators must encourage teachers to create a positive attitude toward independent reading in school. Five guidelines can help influence teachers' attitudes toward independent reading: (1) share valuable information concerning independent reading, including current research findings; (2) build commitment for independent reading through cooperative efforts, with professional staff involvement in all phases of implementation; (3) encourage active staff participation in nurturing children's growth through library activities and classroom library corners; (4) highlight staff development efforts that support a favorable attitude concerning independent reading; and (5) apply aspects of developmental supervision (diagnostic, tactical, and strategic) to the systematic development of independent reading. (A summary of factors supporting a positive attitude toward independent reading, and 23 references are appended.) (MM)

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Creating a Positive Professional Attitude Toward Independent Reading in the Schools.

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Dr. Joseph Sanacore
Department of Reading, Language and Cognition
Hofstra University
Hempstead, Long Island, New York

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The importance of promoting independent reading in the schools has been discussed in the literature. Journals, monographs, and other professional sources have focused on independent reading as a way of fostering an interest in reading, improving fluency with different text structures, and establishing the lifetime reading habit. Although these goals are admirable, they are more likely to be carried out effectively if teachers consider them to be important.

Regrettably, research findings suggest that teachers do not have a positive attitude about supporting independent reading in the schools. Morrow (1986a) found that teachers consider the promotion of voluntary reading to be the least important priority when compared with word recognition, comprehension, and study skills. Morrow's study also considers the attitudes of principals and parents, and the results are similarly disturbing. For instance, both groups rank order voluntary reading as being less important than the other three skill areas, with parents' attitude being the most negative.

These findings as well as practical experience support the need for taking appropriate steps to help teachers develop favorable feelings about using school time for voluntary or independent reading. Such a thrust seems to be a necessity for generating independent reading and for nurturing it on a long-term basis. The following guidelines are therefore suggested as ways of helping teachers to create a positive attitude about encouraging students to read in school. Although these guidelines are not comprehensive, they do provide practical direction.

Guideline #1: Share valuable information concerning independent reading.

Opportunities to discuss ideas about independent reading provide the foundation for implementing this innovation. Administrators can schedule department and faculty meetings for the purpose of sharing pertinent information. Among the issues to be highlighted are societal trends and how they have caused a greater need for promoting independent reading in the schools. For example, the basic competency testing movement has pressured educators into emphasizing instruction that relates directly to testing requirements. The changing home context is another issue that deserves attention because "latch-key" children enter homes each day with no adult supervision. Consequently, they are likely to succumb to questionable habits that actually negate the enjoyment of reading. A third issue that could be discussed concerns the increasing illiteracy and school dropout rates. These are only a few of the areas that have created a stronger need for systematically developing the lifetime reading habit in school. (Sanacore, in press) Discussing these issues increases the chances of improving attitudes toward promoting independent reading as an important part of the instructional program.

More specifically, Morrow (1986a) summarizes other kinds of documented information that should be presented to teachers. These include (1) independent reading is significantly linked to reading achievement (Greaney, 1980; Whitehead, Capey, and Maddren, 1975), (2) independent reading provides opportunities for applying previously learned skills (Morrow and Weinstein,

1984), and (3) independent reading reflects an aspect of personal motivation which could lead to improved skill development. (Irving, 1980) Although this documentation supports the systematic development of independent reading, sharing such documentation does not guarantee a change in attitude concerning this worthwhile idea. Common sense, however, suggests that reasonable people can modify their feelings if they are made aware of objective, updated information.

Guideline #2: Build commitment for independent reading through cooperative efforts.

Beyond the sharing of valuable information, educators are more likely to commit themselves to independent reading if they work cooperatively toward carrying out this innovation. Berman and McLaughlin (1978), Lipham (1980), Samuels (1988), Sanacore (in press), and Sanacore and Rauch (1986) stress the importance of administrators and teachers sharing responsibility during the implementation of innovations. According to Samuels (1988, p.4):

> When goals and methods requiring significant teacher investment of time and energy come from the central office staff without shared input from teachers, the district can expect teachers to resist program implementation. When teachers and administrators work together to establish goals and methods, schools are successful in instituting planned change.

This type of cooperative effort can lead to a sustained, positive attitude concerning useful innovations. As staff members grow

with the new ideas, they tend to develop a deep sense of ownership which, in turn, leads to more support on a long-term basis.

In linking this perspective to independent reading, the professional staff should be cooperatively involved in all phases of implementation. Among these phases are (1) aiming the innovation at remedying school problems, such as the potentially negative impact of societal trends on students' reading habits; (2) determining the best approaches that will lead to program durability; (3) predicting and preventing potential crises that might negatively affect independent reading; and (4) applying appropriate theory and research in feasible ways that sustain independent reading in the school. In addition, the staff should share decision-making in related matters, including materials selection, budgetary considerations, inservice education, and other factors needed for continued success. (Sanacore, in press) These cooperative efforts help to maintain independent reading and also to build a positive attitude toward this innovation.

Guideline #3: Influence the attitude of others through participation.

Related to the importance of cooperation is strong participation among colleagues. Morrow and Weinstein (1984) found that voluntary reading programs that emphasize literature and use classroom library corners are not only effective in increasing children's reading but also successful in changing teachers' attitude. Apparently, the active participation of the staff is a

major factor that results in the improved attitude concerning independent reading.

What types of literary activities are helpful in promoting voluntary reading while simultaneously involving teacher participation? Morrow (1987) and Morrow and Weinstein (1986) support a variety of regularly scheduled activities as being especially useful for increasing voluntary reading. These include allowing children to select books in which they are interested and to read them silently. Classroom teachers also direct literature activities as whole group lessons several times a week during which they read aloud interesting books, discuss different types of literature, encourage children to create their own books, and show "Reading Rainbow" videos. In addition, children have opportunities to engage in free choice time and thus to select from a wide range of personal activities, including reading silently, telling stories, and listening to stories. Finally, each recreational reading period is summarized so that children are able to discuss what they have accomplished.

These types of literary activities are especially effective if they are supported by classroom library corners. Each corner is usually partitioned from the rest of the classroom to prevent unnecessary distractions and to create a sense of privacy. Bookshelves contain a wide variety of materials written at different interest and reading levels. Depending on the children's reading/learning styles, they read as individuals or in groups, sitting at a table or snuggled on a rug. Pillows,

stuffed animals, puppets, and headsets with taped stories are also placed in the corners.

The point to be made here is that as children increase their interest in reading through literary activities and classroom library corners, teachers improve their attitude about independent reading through active participation in nurturing children's growth. Another positive reinforcement is the realization that previous involvement in shared decision-making (for example, materials selection, budgetary considerations, and inservice education) is demonstrating its worth in productive classroom outcomes. This combination of factors is therefore beneficial to both the students and the staff.

Guideline #4: Highlight staff development efforts that support a favorable attitude concerning independent reading.

Although teachers' involvement with literary activities and library corners can improve their attitude toward these variables, teachers' participation in formal staff development efforts can also change their feelings toward the importance of independent reading. A recent synthesis of research and a comprehensive review of the literature on staff development suggest a number of highlights, some of which could positively affect educators' attitude concerning the use of independent reading during the school day. Showers, Joyce, and Bennett (1987) found that teachers' beliefs about teaching are directly related to their actions during teaching. Consequently, workshop participants who are learning about promoting the reading habit

would seem to benefit from direct exposure to succinct approaches that are transferable to the classroom. Such transfer is facilitated when inservice sessions include a presentation of the intended concept or theory, a demonstration of the new activity or strategy, some practice during the sessions, and immediate feedback related to the participants' efforts. Another highlight indicates that teachers are more likely to employ newly gained insights if they receive coaching support from experts or peers in the classroom context. The language arts supervisor or a teacher with independent reading experience could provide this coaching support. Furthermore, teachers who are competent and have high self-esteem seem to derive more benefits from the workshops than do teachers who possess less of these characteristics. Thus, educators with more competence and confidence could be involved with the initial training and implementation concerning innovations such as independent reading, and their efforts could serve as positive examples for other colleagues. Other important considerations for staff development are shared understandings and social cohesion since they help to ease staff members' willingness to support new ideas. Certainly, these factors should be encouraged as ways of initiating and sustaining independent reading.

More specifically, Sanacore (1988) recommends a practical structure for inservice education. After determining a need for using school time to promote the lifetime reading habit, a team of teachers, supervisors, and administrators adapts a series of steps, including setting a goal, stating objectives, selecting

activities to attain the objectives, and evaluating results. (Otto and Erickson, 1973; Shanker, 1982) For example:

1. Setting a goal: to increase teachers' awareness of independent reading and to guide them in developing activities and strategies that support students' use of free reading in the classroom.

2. Stating objectives: (a) to recognize factors associated with independent reading (central library and classroom library) and to use them in the classroom, (b) to choose resources that have merit for independent reading, and (c) to employ methodologies that encourage children to use classroom time for reading.

3. Selecting activities to attain the objectives: (a) the inservice leader focuses on the central and classroom libraries and on their importance in making available a variety of materials; (b) the workshop participants review and discuss pertinent resources and also determine appropriateness of the resources for problem learners, average students, and gifted individuals; and (c) the participants become involved in activities (lecture, demonstration, practice, feedback, etc.) and gain insights about motivational considerations, such as serving as reading models during classroom reading, encouraging students to select materials independently, and guiding students to share reading experiences.

4. Evaluating results: determining the success of staff development includes a variety of approaches, such as performance tests, participants' comments, and observations verifying that

knowledge acquired concerning independent reading is benefiting children in the classroom.

These steps do not guarantee a change in attitude toward independent reading, but they do provide positive involvement in feasible activities that support this important component of the instructional program.

Guideline #5: Apply aspects of developmental supervision to the systematic development of independent reading.

In addition to inservice education, teachers' attitude can be affected through developmental supervision. According to Glickman (1981, 1985) and Glickman and Gordon (1987), the theory of developmental supervision involves three phases: diagnostic, tactical, and strategic. These phases are aimed at helping supervisors match leadership assistance to teachers' conceptual levels, and the major goal is directed toward helping teachers improve independently. Although developmental supervision is not primarily intended for promoting the lifetime reading habit, it can be adapted for the purpose of providing teachers with the type of individual support that upgrades independent reading. The following description highlights the three phases and also suggests ways of linking them to the enhancement of teachers' attitude and effort concerning independent reading.

Phase One: Diagnostic -- The supervisor observes and has discussions with teachers to determine their abstraction levels in dealing with curricular or instructional concerns.

> Teachers exhibiting low abstraction...seek concrete advice from an expert or authority on how to complete a complex task. Teachers exhibiting moderate abstraction...strive for independence but need help in selecting and prioritizing solutions, thinking through consequences, and implementing an improvement plan. Teachers exhibiting high abstraction...can visualize various strategies, anticipate the consequences of each action, and select the most appropriate response. Highly abstract teachers follow the problem-solving task through to completion, taking full responsibility for its results. (Glickman and Gordon, 1987, p. 64)

Phase Two: Tactical -- The supervisor is initially concerned with matching the right leadership approach with each teacher's abstraction level. For example, a directive approach is linked to low abstraction, a collaborative approach is associated with moderate abstraction, and a nondirective approach is matched with high abstraction.

Phase Three: Strategic -- The supervisor is primarily involved in using strategies that advance growth in abstraction levels. Viewing growth from a long-term perspective, the supervisor guides the development of teachers' problem-solving abilities.

In adapting these three phases to independent reading, the language arts supervisor initially diagnoses teachers'

abstraction levels and determines who has difficulty recognizing problems and recommending feasible solutions (Teacher A); who can identify problems and articulate one or two reasonable solutions (Teacher B); and who can define problems from different informational sources and employ appropriate problem-solving strategies independently (Teacher C).

Afterward, the supervisor provides immediate, tactical support by matching strategies with teachers' abstraction levels. For instance, the supervisor may provide Teacher A with basic information and direction concerning independent reading efforts, such as how to organize a classroom library, how to motivate self-selection of materials, and how to serve as a reading model during silent reading. This teacher of low abstraction chooses from among the alternatives that the supervisor suggests. Teacher B might benefit from working in a collaborative relationship with the supervisor in sharing insights and agreeing on approaches to such concerns as literary activities that support the lifetime reading habit and effective uses of classroom library corners. Teacher C usually relates well to the nondirective leadership approach. The supervisor may encourage this individual to function independently while resolving a variety of issues, including how to increase reading achievement through voluntary reading and how to help students blend previously learned skills during the reading act.

After matching supervisory approaches with teachers' abstraction levels, the language arts supervisor focuses on the strategic phase. As teachers show readiness for growth, the

supervisor may provide individuals with new approaches to recreational reading and may guide others to be more independent during problem-solving concerning this innovation. The supervisor may also encourage teachers of low abstraction to work cooperatively with teachers of slightly higher abstraction as a strategy for promoting growth.

Applying the theory of developmental supervision is another part of the school's repertoire for supporting independent reading. As teachers demonstrate conceptual growth, they increase the potential for improving their attitude toward integrating independent reading into the instructional program.

Summary

This paper does not focus on actual approaches to promoting the lifetime reading habit, since such approaches already have been suggested by Hillerich (1983), Morrow (1986b, 1987), Sanacore (1983, 1988), Spiegel (1981), and others. Instead, the focus here is on creating a favorable attitude toward using school time for independent reading. This thrust is important because it builds the foundation for supporting a major aspect of long-term literacy. Sharing valuable information, building commitment through cooperative efforts, influencing colleagues through participation, highlighting staff development, and applying developmental supervision are five suggested guidelines for building a favorable attitude toward independent reading. Although these guidelines require time and commitment, they are worth the effort since a solid attitude supporting lifetime

literacy efforts has the potential for significantly denting the illiteracy estimates which range between 27 and 72 million.

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Summary of Factors Supporting a Positive Attitude Toward Independent Reading

1. Sharing pertinent information concerning such areas as
   - A. societal trends and their potentially negative impact on children's lives
   - B. research findings supporting voluntary reading
2. Increasing commitment through cooperative efforts, including
   - A. administrators and teachers working together to develop goals and methods
   - B. the professional staff being involved in all phases of implementing independent reading
   - C. the staff sharing decision-making in matters concerning this innovation.
3. Encouraging active staff participation in nurturing chidren's growth through
   - A. literary activities
   - B. classroom library corners
4. Highlighting inservice efforts that
   - A. are supported by the research and literature of the field
   - B. focus on a practical structure
5. Applying the three phases of developmental supervision which are
   - A. diagnostic
   - B. tactical
   - C. strategic